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# SOCIOCULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

A Problem-Based Approach

THIRD CANADIAN EDITION

# CONSTRUCTING FAMILIES AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS



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This soapstone sculpture by Inuit artist Jonasie Quaqortoq Faber, simply titled “Family,” depicts a family unit—mother, father, and child—that many North Americans would identify as the “typical” nuclear family. However, the dynamics of the Inuit nuclear family are not necessarily the same as the nuclear family dynamics described in the epigraph below by Whately. Indeed, as we will see throughout this chapter, family dynamics and configurations vary widely from culture to culture.

*If ever thou purpose to be a good wife, and to live comfortably, set down this with thyself: mine husband is my superior, my better, he hath authority and rule over me; nature hath given it to him ... God hath given it to him.*

W. Whately, *A Bride-Bush, or, A Wedding Sermon*: London, 1617

### Problem 5

What do we need to know before we can understand the dynamics of family life in other societies?

## INTRODUCTION

### Family Relations in North American Popular Culture

In 1973, renowned anthropologist Margaret Mead reviewed a new, genre-defying television show, which aired on PBS, titled *An American Family*. The 12-episode documentary chronicled seven months in the lives of the Loud family of Santa Barbara, California, a “typical” nuclear family comprised of a husband, a wife, and their five children. Why would an eminent anthropologist be interested in a television program? For Mead, the controversial program—an early prototype for today’s ubiquitous reality television shows—was “as important for our time as were the invention of drama and the novel for earlier generations: a new way to help people understand themselves” (cited in Ruoff 1996, 270). Ten million people tuned in weekly to “understand themselves.” Much of the interest the show generated had to do with the unexpected, soap opera-like plot twists and character developments: Pat Loud, the mother, asked her husband William for a divorce; William’s successful business fell on hard times; and Lance, the eldest son, was arguably the world’s first openly gay TV “character.”

An anthropologist might have learned a great deal about North American family relations in the 1970s by watching *An American Family*, noting the reasons for domestic strife, the choices characters made, and the impact those choices had on family members. Furthermore, an anthropologist would learn much by paying close attention to viewers’ reactions to the show: What did they find plausible, scandalous, or relatable? What exactly was it about this family that made its members both typical and compelling?

Although North American viewers no longer find reality television especially groundbreaking, and many would be unfazed by the inclusion of divorced or

gay characters, an anthropologist might still want to pay attention to the family structure and dynamics portrayed on popular television shows and the discussions they evoke. For instance, in May 2012, U.S. President Barack Obama publicly declared his support for same-sex marriage (which has been legal in Canada since 2005). In an interview with ABC News, he explained that he had taken his cue from his two young daughters, who had schoolmates whose parents were gay and who could not imagine why they would be denied the right to marry. President Obama's statement echoed the growing public support for same-sex marriage; nonetheless, it generated much controversy. For instance, Bristol Palin, daughter of 2008 Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin, criticized the president in her blog post titled "Hail to the Chiefs: Malia and Sasha Obama." She suggested that Obama's daughters had watched too many episodes of *Glee*—a popular television show with several prominent gay characters—and that President Obama should be a "proper" father and leader, teaching his daughters what to do and think rather than allowing them to teach him. Palin's critics, in turn, suggested that having become a single mother at the age of 18, she was in no position to judge others regarding issues pertaining to the family. Whose version of the North American family is the "correct" one?

The study of **kinship**, including family composition, descent, and marriage, has long been central to sociocultural anthropology. Franklin and McKinnon (2001, 1) argue that, in fact, "the study of kinship is itself symbolic of the anthropological tradition." Kinship has long intrigued anthropologists because it relates so closely to social organization. Many early anthropologists assumed that kinship was more important in small-scale societies, where it provided the entire basis of social organization, than in large-scale societies. But as we will find later in this chapter, contemporary kinship studies have demonstrated that kinship remains a meaningful element of social life in large-scale societies. When we study kinship, we are interested both in classifications—who is considered a relative and who is not—and in the ways people

make particular relationships meaningful. Anthropologists who study family relations often begin by exploring the composition of a typical family and how it is formed and maintained. They examine how the themes of sexuality, love, and wealth are dealt with and what kinds of situations or conflicts can disrupt family life. However, as we can see from the example above, the typical family is just that: an ideal type that may or may not closely align with people's everyday experiences. Questions about what does or does not count as a family, what kinds of rights various members should have, and who should be the head of the household can be contentious. By exploring both the typical family *and* the debates about its composition, however, we can learn much about a given society.

To make the task of understanding patterns of family relations cross-culturally more manageable, we will focus first on family life in three societies: the Ju/'hoansi of Namibia and Botswana, the Trobriand Islanders of the South Pacific, and a rural Chinese farm family in Taiwan. These have been selected for three reasons. First, they represent very different levels of social, cultural, and technological complexity. The Ju/'hoansi are gatherers and hunters living in small, mobile groups; the Trobriand Islanders are horticulturists living in villages of up to 400 people; and the rural Chinese in Taiwan represent a large agricultural society. Second, family structure and roles vary significantly among the three, as do notions about the bases of kinship relations and how kinship terms, such as mother, father, sister, and brother, are used. Finally, the three societies have been well studied in the anthropological literature. We will discuss these societies in what anthropologists refer to as the **ethnographic present**; that is, although the actual descriptions may

### **kinship**

Refers to the anthropological, cross-cultural study of family composition, marriage, and descent patterns.

### **ethnographic present**

Use of the present tense to describe a culture, although the description may refer to situations that existed in the past.

refer to situations that existed in the past, they will be described as if they still exist. In reality, the Ju/'hoansi, the Trobriand Islanders, and the rural Chinese are, to varying degrees, very different today than they were when they were studied by the anthropologists whose work we will mention. After this review, we will look at more recent kinship studies by anthropologists to show some of the problems they have encountered and the new directions they have taken.

## QUESTIONS

- 5.1** What is the composition of the typical family group?
- 5.2** How are families formed, and how is the ideal family type maintained?
- 5.3** What are the roles of sexuality, love, and wealth?
- 5.4** What threatens to disrupt the family unit?
- 5.5** How has the anthropological study of families changed?
- 5.6** How can understanding patterns of family relations be relevant outside academia?

## QUESTION 5.1: WHAT IS THE COMPOSITION OF THE TYPICAL FAMILY GROUP?

To understand family composition in different societies, we need certain concepts and tools. One place to begin is by examining how unmarried North Americans would typically respond if asked about the composition of their families. They would likely list their mother, father, brothers, and sisters. If asked, “Who else?” they would likely add grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. If married, they would add their spouse and children. Figure 5.1 shows how this family structure would be diagrammed using genealogical notations.

David Schneider was one of the first anthropologists to study American kinship systematically, and his 1968 study led him to conclude that kinship, in North America and elsewhere, is a cultural system, not a set of biological facts. For instance, although Americans talk about kinship in terms of biological relatedness (often using the metaphor of shared blood), in practice, kinship is not dictated by any biogenetic reality. Often, we call people kin who are not related to us biogenetically. Many of us, for instance, grow up referring to close friends of our parents as “aunt” or “uncle” despite the fact that we are not biologically related to them. Such relationships can even extend to companion animals. Many people think about their dogs or cats in terms of kinship. Dogs, for instance, are often perceived as family members, with owners taking on the role of “parents” and dogs as “kids.” Conversely, we often deny kinship status to biogenetic relatives (Feinberg 2001, 8). Family members can become “estranged” due to familial disagreements or a family member’s participation in illegal or seemingly unethical activities. Ultimately, we employ the language of blood, of love, and of solidarity strategically to determine whom we consider kin and whom we do not.

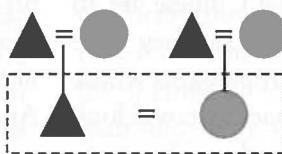
## EXERCISE 5.1

Using the genealogical notations introduced in Figure 5.1, draw a kinship diagram of your own family. Include as many generations and as many lateral kin as are relevant to your own family life. Would you include anyone who is not biologically related to you? Have you left out someone who is a “blood” relative but whom you do not consider kin? How do you explain these inclusions and exclusions in your family?

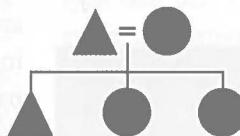
Certain features of some North American families stand out for the anthropological observer. Many North Americans consider themselves equally tied by kinship to both their mother and their father, and

**FIGURE 5.1 COMPOSITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CANADIAN NUCLEAR FAMILY**

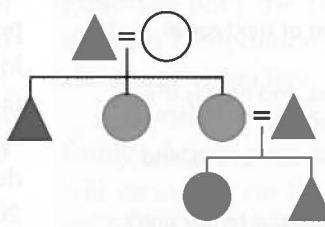
1. The traditional Canadian household generally begins with a husband and wife pair moving from the households of their parents.



2. The arrangement is formalized with the birth of children, which produces a new nuclear family.



3. At some point the household might be composed of three generations, as married children join the household with their children.



KEY	
Female	●
Male	▲
Marriage	=
Blood Tie	□
Descent	

4. At a later stage, the household might consist of the original couple or a single person.



to both their maternal and their paternal kin. In other words, North Americans generally recognize **bilateral kinship**, or kinship through both parents. As we will see, however, not all societies do. Second, many North Americans make no linguistic distinction between the mother's siblings and the father's siblings; both are referred to as aunt or uncle, as are the spouses of their parents' siblings. Nor do they distinguish linguistically the children of aunts and uncles; all are referred to as cousins. For many North Americans, the most important family grouping is the **nuclear family**—the group that traditionally consists of father and mother and their biological or adopted children.

Notions of what constitutes a nuclear family, however, change over time. Increasingly within Canadian society, for instance, the concept of the nuclear family has shifted to also encompass same-sex partners who live with their biological or

adopted children. With the increasing social acceptance of same-sex partnerships, and the advent of the *Civil Marriage Act* in 2005 that legalized them, the nuclear family does not necessarily imply the existence of heterosexual unions.

Families in other societies may be composed very differently. For example, other societies may place greater emphasis on ties to one parent or the other. In some cases, only people related through *either* the mother *or* the father are considered family. Societies that emphasize persons' ties to their mother are said to

#### bilateral kinship

A system in which individuals trace their descent through both parents.

#### nuclear family

The family group consisting of parents and their biological or adopted children.

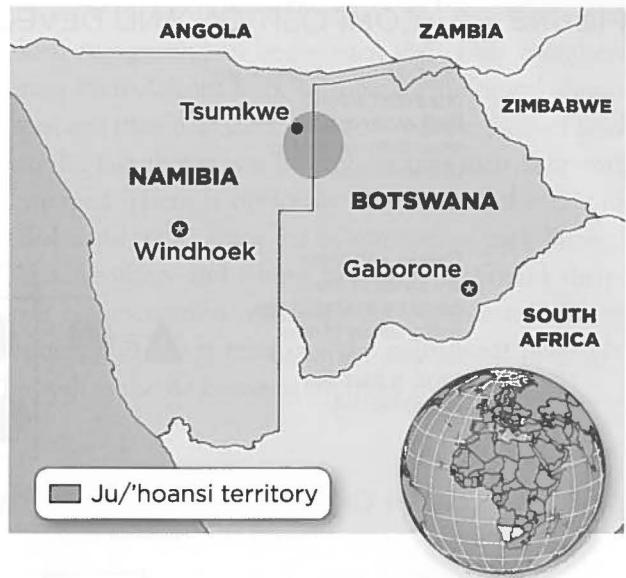
have **matrilineal kinship** systems; those that emphasize persons' ties to their father are said to have **patrilineal kinship** systems. Few societies ignore an individual's relationship to one side of the family or the other; rather, in most societies, relationships with mothers' families and fathers' families are viewed differently. For example, North Americans traditionally inherit their surnames from their fathers, thus embracing the patrilineal principle; in cases of divorce, however, North American legal systems usually give priority to the matrilineal principle by awarding custody of the child to the mother.

Each of the three societies discussed in this chapter—the Ju/'hoansi, the Trobrianders, and the rural Chinese—defines the composition of the family and relations among members differently.

## The Family Composition of Ju/'hoansi

For most of the year, the Ju/'hoansi live in groups numbering 10 to 30 or 40 people, bilaterally related (through both parents), who hunt and gather in a territory associated with a particular water hole. Camp groups are often organized around a brother-and-sister pair who claim ownership of the water hole. They bring their spouses and children into the group; in turn, the spouses may bring in their brothers, sisters, and even mothers and fathers.

A typical camp might look like the one described by Elizabeth Thomas in her classic work *The Harmless People* (see Figure 5.2). Membership in a camp is fluid. People move freely from camp to camp based on hunting alliances or because conflict develops in the group. Within the camp, however, the basic family group is the nuclear family of husband, wife, and children. Children spend most of their time with their mothers. The Ju/'hoansi acknowledge that pregnancy results from sexual intercourse (not the case in all societies). They also believe that conception



takes place at the end of the woman's menses, when the man's semen joins with the last of the menstrual blood.

A feature of Ju/'hoansi society that figures prominently in the dynamics of family life is the custom of **brideservice** at marriage, which requires that a groom work for the bride's parents for a specified time. Among the Ju/'hoansi, when a couple marries, the groom is expected to come and live in the bride's parents' camp and work for her parents for as long as ten years. Tales of Ju/'hoansi family life are often built around the effects of this arrangement on family dynamics.

### matrilineal kinship

A system of descent in which persons are related to their kin through the mother only.

### patrilineal kinship

A system of descent in which persons are related to their kin through the father only.

### brideservice

The requirement that when a couple marries, the groom must work for the bride's parents for some specified time.

**FIGURE 5.2 COMPOSITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF A JU/'HOANSI CAMP**

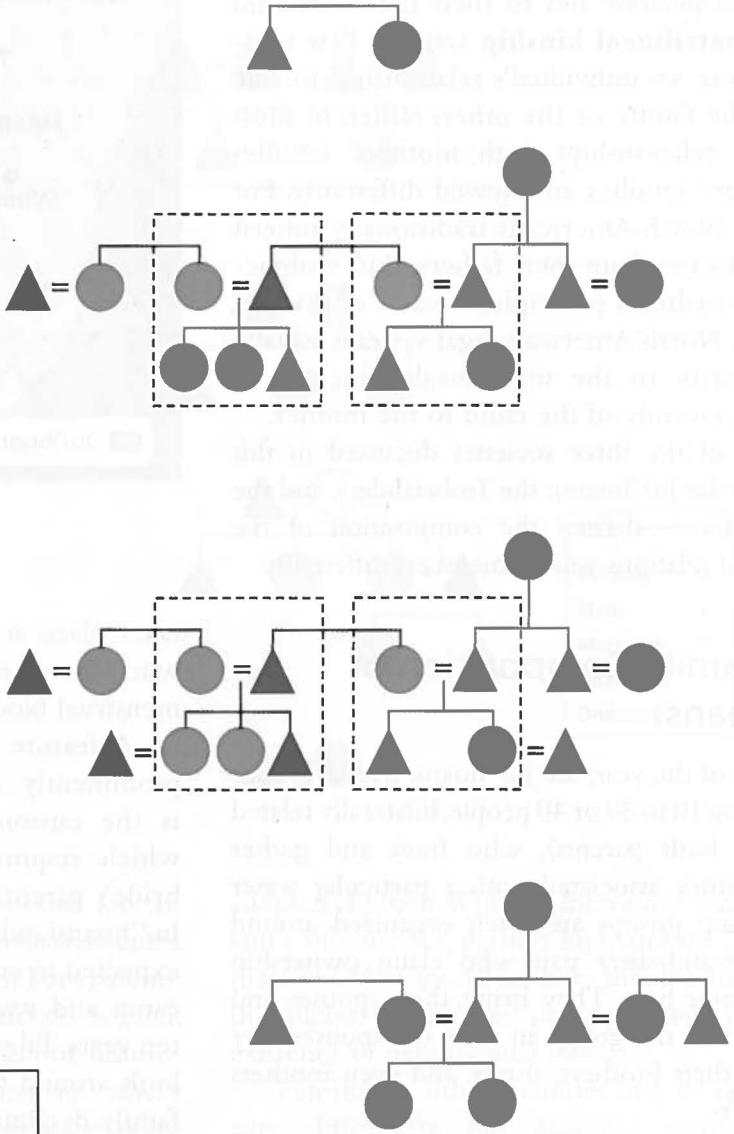
1. Most Ju/'hoansi camps are organized around brother/sister pairs who claim ownership of a water hole.

2. Brother and sister are joined at the camp by their spouses and relatives of their spouses. The nuclear family is the main economic unit.

3. Bridegrooms join the camp of brides' parents for brideservice.

4. Camp composition changes as a result of changing social relations.

KEY	
Female	●
Male	▲
Marriage	=
Blood Tie	□
Descent	



## The Family Composition of Trobriand Islanders

The people of the Trobriand Islands live in some 80 villages, whose populations range from 40 to 400. Each village is surrounded by water holes, fruit trees, palm groves, and cultivated fields of yams, taro, and

other crops. Each is further divided into hamlets, and each hamlet ideally consists of a **matrilineage**, or *dala*, as Trobrianders call it—that is, a group of

### matrilineage

A lineage that is formed by tracing descent in the female line.

men related to one another through the female line, along with their wives and unmarried children.

The matrilineages are ranked relative to one another, and each village has a chief who is the eldest male of the highest-ranking matrilineage. Since each person is a member of the lineage of his or her mother, neither a man's wife nor his children can be members of his own *dala* (see Figure 5.3).

Trobrianders' mythology and beliefs about procreation dramatically depict the matrilineal element in their lives. Their mythology contains stories of how,

a long time ago, pairs of brothers and sisters emerged from the ground to begin each *dala*. *Dala* members trace their descent back to their mythological ancestors, and they base their claims to specific plots of land on the fact that it was from there that their ancestors emerged. There is obviously an element of incest in Trobriand myth, since the originators of each lineage were brothers and sisters; however, Trobriand theories of procreation ostensibly deny a role to men in conception. They reinforce the matrilineal principle as well as the tie between brothers and sisters.

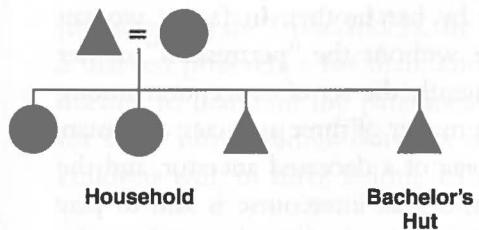
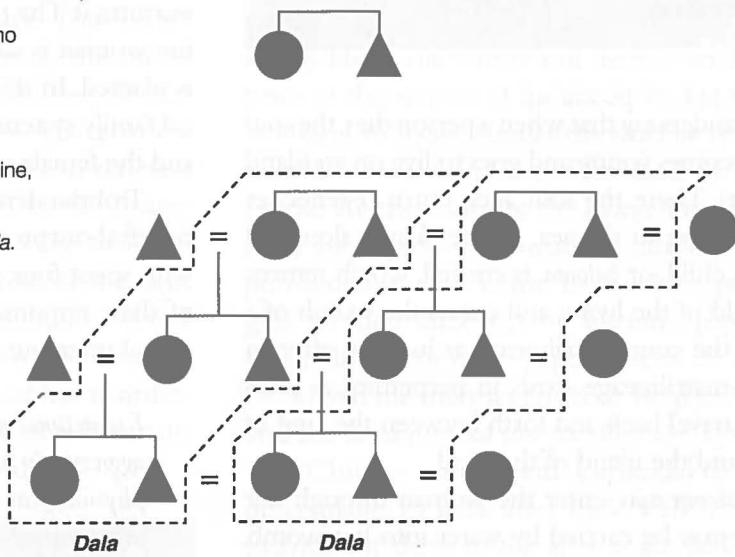
**FIGURE 5.3 COMPOSITION OF A TROBRIAND ISLAND *DALA* AND HOUSEHOLD**

1. Each *dala* or matrilineage had its origin in a brother/sister pair who claim a plot of land.

2. *Dala* marriage is traced in the female line, and individuals must marry someone from outside their own *dala*.

3. Households in the Trobriand Islands are composed of wives, husbands, and children. Males 12 to 15 years of age each live in a bachelor's hut. If a male will inherit land from the *dala* of his mother's brother, he lives near his uncle.

KEY	
Female	●
Male	▲
Marriage	=
Blood Tie	□
Descent	





Trobrianders say that when a person dies, the soul or spirit becomes young and goes to live on an island called Tuma. There the soul ages, but it regenerates itself by bathing in the sea. As the skin is sloughed off, a spirit child, or *baloma*, is created, which returns to the world of the living and enters the womb of a woman of the same matrilineage as itself. In effect, a Trobriand matrilineage exists in perpetuity, as souls and spirits travel back and forth between the land of the living and the island of the dead.

The *baloma* may enter the woman through her head, or it may be carried by water into her womb. In some areas of the Trobriand Islands, if a woman wishes to become pregnant, a pail of water is brought to her dwelling by her brother. In fact, a woman cannot conceive without the "permission" of her brother. Consequently, the act of conception among Trobrianders is a matter of three agencies: a woman, the spirit or *baloma* of a deceased ancestor, and the woman's brother. Sexual intercourse is said to play no role in conception, but it does play a role in the development and growth of the fetus. Trobrianders believe that the man's semen provides food and nourishment for the fetus, and that is why children physically resemble their fathers. Sexual intercourse is also said to open the womb for the child to emerge.

While Trobriand procreation beliefs may, at first glance, seem strange, in the context of their ideas about descent they make perfect sense. When a person is believed to be descended exclusively from the mother, possible relations and ties to the father are excluded not only socially but physically, as well. In fact, we find in strongly patrilineal societies corresponding beliefs about conception. Earlier in this book, we examined how Carol Delaney (1991, 26) explained how Turkish villagers had a "monogenetic" theory of procreation. "It is the males," she wrote, "who give life; women merely give birth." Turkish villagers use an agricultural metaphor to describe procreation: men provide the seed, and women are the soil. It is the seed that contains life; the soil simply nurtures it. The man is believed to plant the seed, and the woman is said to be the field in which the seed is planted. In this way, the male role in the patrilineal family system of the Turkish village is emphasized and the female role is diminished.

Trobrianders can rationalize and "prove" their beliefs about procreation easily. Bronislaw Malinowski, who spent four years studying the Trobrianders, tells of their response when he suggested to them that sexual intercourse plays a role in procreation:

*I sometimes made myself definitely and aggressively an advocate of the truer physiological doctrine of procreation. In such arguments the natives would quote, not only positive instances of women who have children without having intercourse; but would also refer to the many cases in which an unmarried woman has plenty of intercourse and no children. This argument would be repeated over and over again, with specially telling concrete examples of childless persons renowned for profligacy, or of women who lived with one white trader after another without having any baby. (Malinowski 1929, 185–86)*

To what extent Trobrianders really deny a role to men in procreation is a matter of some debate. Annette Weiner, who worked with them in the early 1970s,

some 50 years after Malinowski's pioneering work, reported that they no longer denied the direct role of men in conception. However, she also reported a case where a grandmother claimed she had used magic to make her granddaughter pregnant when the woman conceived during her husband's absence.

Regardless of the extent to which Trobrianders recognize the role of coitus, their ideas about descent and procreation reflect important features of the composition of their families. First, the key family relationship for them is not, as it is among the Ju/'hoansi, between husband and wife; it is between brother and sister. Second, the father of the family is an outsider to his children, a member of another family group. His interest, ideally, is in his sister's children, since it is they who are members of his matrilineage. Third, since the matrilineal **extended family** group, the *dala*, is more important than the nuclear family, Trobrianders merge certain people under the same kin term the same way many North Americans refer to different kinds of kin as aunt, uncle, or cousin. In the Trobrianders' case, a person refers to all women of his or her matrilineage of the same generation by the same term; for example, a man refers to his mother, as well as his mother's sisters, by the term *ina*. A woman refers to her brother and to all other men of her matrilineage and generation as *luta*. Thus, a man has many "sisters," and a woman has many "brothers."

### EXERCISE 5.2

The procreation beliefs of the Trobriand Islanders prompted debate among anthropologists about whether the Trobrianders really did believe that men played little or no role in reproduction or whether, to emphasize the matrilineal principle, they pretended not to acknowledge the male role. In either case, we would expect to find in societies that emphasize the patrilineal principle that a woman's role in reproduction is de-emphasized. What kind of belief about reproduction might deny the importance of the female? How does this compare with the biological roles of men and women in North American societies?

## The Family Composition of Rural Chinese

Family life in rural China revolves around the patrilineal extended family household of a married couple, their married sons and daughters-in-law, and their grandchildren and unmarried daughters (see Figure 5.4). To understand a rural Chinese family, you have to understand the idea of *temporal depth*, for in China, the **patrilineage** exists as much in time as it does in space, and the family includes a long line of patrilineal ancestors. A patrilineage is a lineage that is formed by tracing descent in the male line. Anthropologist Francis L. K. Hsu notes that the identity of each male is defined by his relations to the dead as much as it is by his relations to the living. His social worth and destiny are but reflections of the actions of his ancestors. He thus exists, as Hsu (1967) says, "under the shadow of his ancestors." Likewise, the spirits of the dead are dependent on the contributions of the living. These contributions are ceremonially made at altars, prominently positioned in each home, from which people send gifts to their ancestors by burning paper money, paper clothes, or other articles.

Given the interdependence between the living and the dead men of the patrilineage, it is apparent why Chinese males deem it essential to have male descendants to look after their well-being and to provide for them in the afterworld. Male children and grandchildren are living proof to a man that his line will continue. For this reason, unlike the Ju/'hoansi or the Trobrianders, the Chinese express a marked preference for male children. Males are needed to maintain the patrilineal descent group, for if the only children born are daughters whose children will, in turn, belong to the patrilineage

#### **extended family**

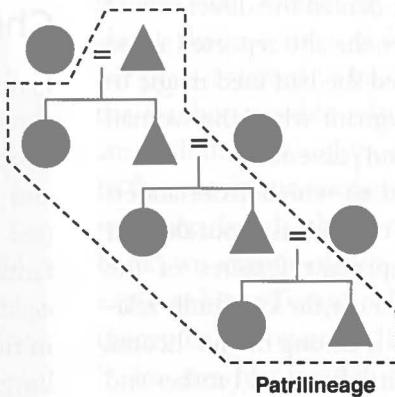
A family group based on blood relations of three or more generations.

#### **patrilineage**

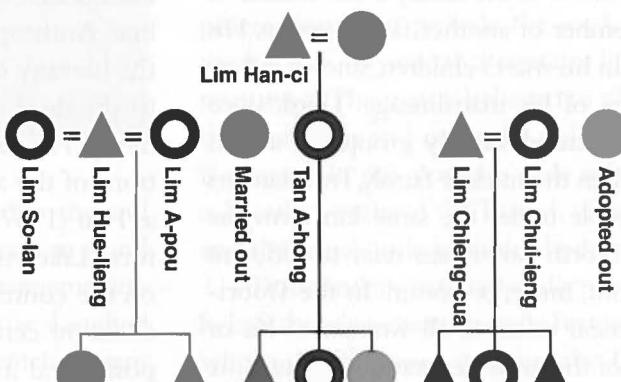
A lineage that is formed by tracing descent in the male line.

FIGURE 5.4 COMPOSITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF A RURAL CHINESE FAMILY

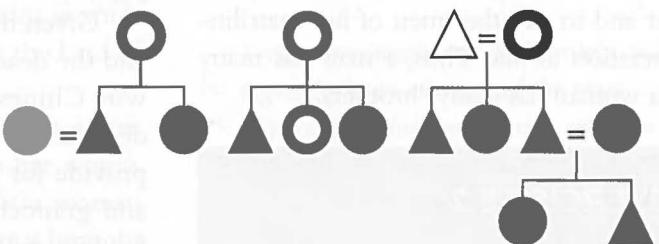
1. The traditional Chinese family exists in time as well as in space. Descent is traced patrilineally for generations.



2. An ideal family would be similar to that of the Lim household in Taiwan.



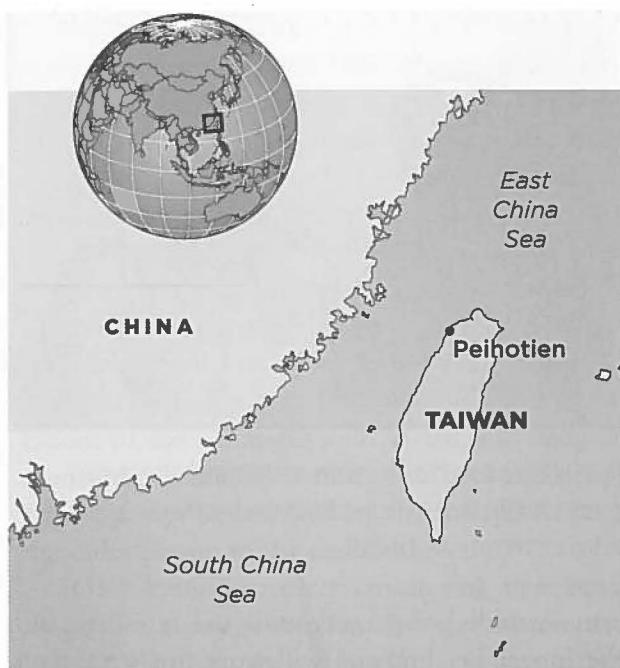
3. Most Chinese extended households eventually break up into separate nuclear family units, with wives of sons joining their husbands' households.



KEY	
Female	●
Male	▲
Marriage	=
Blood Tie	□
Descent	—
Adopted	○
Daughter	

of their husbands, a family line will die out. A son, as some Chinese put it, is a major happiness; a daughter is but a small happiness.

In addition to a long line of male ancestors, an ideal rural Chinese household should include several generations of fathers and sons sharing a



common hearth or cooking stove and an ancestral altar: the symbols of the household. In the architecture of Peihotien, the village where Margery Wolf (1968) did her fieldwork, houses are constructed in such a way that they can easily be extended to accommodate additional sons and grandsons, who bring their wives to live in the family home. In reality it is very difficult to maintain this ideal; most households in villages such as Peihotien are small, consisting of a married couple and several dependent patrilineal relatives.

### RESOURCE 5.1

The study of kinship organization and terminology can be highly complex, yet it is essential for understanding the patterns of social organization of many societies. You can find out more about this and engage in some entertaining exercises in an interactive tutorial, Brian Schwimmer's Kinship and Social Organization, at <http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/kintitle.html>

## QUESTION 5.2: HOW ARE FAMILIES FORMED, AND HOW IS THE IDEAL FAMILY TYPE MAINTAINED?

Regardless of the size of family units or descent systems, most societies require the socially recognized union of a male and a female (we will discuss the exceptions later in this chapter). Generally, this union takes the form of marriage, a publicly recognized joining of two people or two families. However, while marriage makes or sustains families, the manner in which such an arrangement comes about varies significantly in different societies. In North American societies, for example, many children begin learning about courtship and marriage at an early age: five- and six-year-olds are teased about their “boyfriends” or “girlfriends,” and playing house together is a popular preschool pastime. Most North Americans begin serious courting in their early teens and usually have a series of relationships before choosing a partner for their first marriage, most often when they are between the ages of 18 and 30. Although the choice of a marriage partner is supposedly based on feelings of love and sexual attraction, other factors also influence it. North Americans, like people in all societies, are prohibited by the **incest taboo** from marrying or having sexual relations with kin of certain categories, such as brothers or sisters, children or parents, or, in some cases, cousins. Preferences (sometimes tacit, sometimes explicit) also exist about choosing one's spouse from an appropriate income, ethnic, religious, gender, and/or racial group.

#### incest taboo

A rule that prohibits sexual relations among kin of certain categories, such as brothers or sisters, parents and children, or, in some cases, cousins.

The marriage ceremony in many North American societies is often arranged and financed by the bride's family. After the honeymoon, the couple ideally establishes an independent residence. Their relationship based on love expressed through regular sexual intercourse is later transformed by the arrival of one or more children, when a wife becomes a mother and a husband, a father. However, the cycles of events that create or sustain the family among the Ju/'hoansi, the Trobrianders, and the rural Chinese illustrate the diversity of such arrangements.

## The Family Cycle of Ju/'hoansi

Ju/'hoansi men and women, like most North Americans, begin to learn about courtship, sex, and marriage early in life. Because there is little privacy in a Ju/'hoansi camp and children sleep with their parents, they soon are playing at marriage and imitating the bodily movements of parents making love. Most young men and women have had sexual experiences by the time they are 15.

Ju/'hoansi men usually marry for the first time between the ages of 18 and 25, when they are able to hunt and work for their wives' parents. Marriage is important for a man for a number of reasons. It marks him as an adult worthy of taking part in Ju/'hoansi public life, he gains a sex partner, and he gains a mate to provide his food. While men are obligated to share and formally distribute the meat they obtain in the hunt with everyone in the camp, women are not obligated to share what they gather outside their nuclear family group, and women gather from 60 to 80 percent of the food in a camp.

Women often marry as early as 12 to 14 years of age, generally before their first menstruation, which occurs at about 17. Girls have fewer reasons to marry than men. Single or married men are always available as sex partners, and since the product of male labour, meat, is widely shared, a woman need not have a husband to ensure her share of the hunt. A girl's parents, however, have good reasons for getting her married as soon as possible. The earlier she is married, the longer she and her husband will



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In Ju/'hoansi culture, most marriages are arranged by the couple's parents, and the bride-to-be frequently objects to the chosen spouse or to the prospect of marriage itself.

remain with her parents until she is of age, and the longer her husband will work for her parents. Moreover, the bride's family gains an alliance with another family and is less likely to get involved in open conflict between men over their daughter.

Marriages are almost always arranged by the couple's parents. Typically, the mother or father of the male approaches the family of the girl with a proposal for marriage. If the girl's parents approve of the match, the families exchange gifts to indicate their agreement. An appropriate husband for a daughter is a man who is not too much older, is not yet married, is a good hunter, and is willing to accept responsibility. The prospective groom should also be cooperative, generous, and unaggressive.

The Ju/'hoansi not only avoid choosing a spouse who is a close kinsperson, but also are restricted in the choice of a marriage partner by their naming system. There are only about 30 to 40 names that can be chosen for newborns, and people with the same first name consider themselves connected, regardless of their actual kinship relation to one another. For example, if two people are named Toma, then everyone related by kinship to one Toma will be considered related in the same way to the other Toma. Consequently, if a man's name is Toma, all the brothers and sisters of everyone else named Toma would be considered his

brothers and sisters, all the sons and daughters of any other Toma would be considered his sons and daughters, and so on. Therefore, a marriage partner should occupy neither an actual prohibited kinship category nor one created by the naming system. A woman, for example, could not marry a man with the same name as her father or a man whose father had the same name as her father, since she and the man would refer to themselves as brother and sister. When Richard Lee (1984) was working with the Ju/'hoansi kinship system, he found that interpretations of the naming system varied, and disagreements about the kin connection between people would always be resolved by the interpretation of the older person in the relationship.

Once a suitable match is made, one more obstacle to the marriage remains. Perhaps because they have little to gain or much to lose, young women often object strenuously to the marriage or to their parents' choice of a husband. If they protest long and hard enough, the marriage will be called off; if the protest is not sufficient to call off the arrangements, a marriage ceremony takes place. A hut set apart from the bride's family village is built for the couple by members of both families. Friends bring the couple to the hut, and the girl, head covered, is placed in the hut. Coals from the fires of both families are brought to start the fire in the couple's hut. Friends stay, joking, singing, and dancing, while bride and groom stay apart. Often, especially if the girl is young, a relative stays with them in the hut until she begins to adjust to her new status. These "honeymoons" are often the source of continuing conflict.

Working among the Ju/'hoansi, Marjorie Shostak (1983) forged a close relationship with a Ju/'hoansi woman, Nisa, who described her wedding night. Nisa said she cried so much and objected so strongly to spending the night with her new husband, Bo, that her parents asked a female relative, Nukha, to sleep between Nisa and Bo. She soon discovered that Nukha was having sex with Bo, and after a few nights, she told her parents. They took her and moved to another water hole, leaving Nukha and Bo behind.

Typically, half of all first marriages fail among the Ju/'hoansi, who may enter several marriages over the course of their lives. Nisa's second marriage, to Tashay, followed the same lines as her first; on her wedding night she cried and cried and eventually ran away into the bush. Relatives tried to explain the benefits of marriage and to convince her to accept Tashay. When she finally agreed, Tashay took Nisa to his parents' home to live, and Nisa's parents followed. But not until Nisa and Tashay had been living together for a long time did they have sex. Nisa remembers the aftermath of their first lovemaking as being painful, and it was a long time before she allowed it again and began to enjoy it.

## The Family Cycle of Trobriand Islanders

Courtship and sexual play begin early in the Trobriand Islands. Children play erotic games at the ages of seven and eight and begin seeking sex partners at ages 11 to 13. Trobriand adolescents are permitted to openly display their affection for each other; girls scratch, beat, thrash, or even wound their lovers, and boys accept this treatment as a sign of love and display their wounds as proof of manliness and success in courtship. They sing about love, both successful and unrequited, and take great pains with their physical appearance. Here is what Malinowski says about adolescent courtship: "An adolescent gets definitely attached to a given person, wishes to possess her, works purposefully toward his goal, plans to reach fulfillment of his desires by magical and other means, and finally rejoices in achievement. I have seen young people of this age grow positively miserable through ill-success in love" (Malinowski 1929, 63).

Because sexual activity before marriage is common and expected among Trobrianders, the couple often has already been living together, and the marriage simply formalizes an existing relationship. Although the couple may take the initiative in arranging a marriage, parents approve or disapprove of the choice of a spouse and sometimes arrange matches. There are people of certain

categories a Trobriander may not marry. All Trobrianders belong to one of four **clans**, groups whose members consider themselves descended from a common ancestor. They must observe **exogamy**, which requires one to marry outside one's own group—in this case, out of their own clan and into another (other societies practice **endogamy**, which requires marriage inside one's own group). In addition, the incest taboo applies to all close relatives, particularly brothers and sisters, who include all members of a matrilineage of the same generation. Trobriand myths tell of disastrous consequences of brother–sister incest that resulted in both parties committing suicide. Sexual relations between a father and daughter are prohibited, although Trobrianders tell stories about it and joke about the idea of a father being overwhelmed by the beauty of his daughter. From a Trobriand point of view, fathers are not related by kinship to their daughters. The best marriage for a man is to a woman from his father's clan, for then his children, who will trace their descent from their mother, will be members of his father's clan. Consequently, the close relationship a man has with members of his father's clan will continue into the next generation.

There is no formal marriage ceremony; the girl simply stays overnight in her boyfriend's house. The next morning the bride's mother brings the couple cooked yams to indicate the bride's family's approval of the marriage. If the girl's parents don't approve, they demand that their daughter return home with them. Sharing food is considered by Trobrianders to be more intimate than having sex. Later, the wife's mother and maternal uncle bring raw yams for the couple, while the groom's father and maternal uncle begin collecting **bridewealth**—valuables, such as stone axe blades, shells, and money—to give to the wife's kin and her father. The requirement of bridewealth makes young men dependent on members of their matrilineage. This relationship is unlike that of the brideservice required of a Ju/'hoansi man in that brideservice does not obligate a man to members of his family (see Question 5.1).

During the first year of marriage, the couple lives in the hut that served as the groom's adolescent retreat, and during that year the groom's mother brings meals for them to share. At the end of the year, the groom's mother builds a stone hearth for the couple. At that point the wife becomes responsible for the cooking.

The end of the first year of marriage marks a dramatic change in the husband–wife relationship. They no longer eat together, and the sexuality that bound them together as adolescents must be publicly submerged. After the first year of marriage it is shameful for anyone to refer to the couple's sex life together. In public, a husband and wife never hold hands or display affection. Their lives become segmented into a private domain in which affection and emotion can be displayed, and a public domain in which the meaning of their relationship is dictated by their obligation to help ensure the continuity and honour of their respective matrilineages.

The matrilineal principle in the life of a Trobriand husband and wife requires each to have a continued involvement with others outside the nuclear family. In addition to his ties to and concerns for his wife and children, the husband is also involved in the family life of his matrilineage: his sisters and their children. The wife is continually involved with her and her children's matrilineage—particularly her brothers. This involvement is

#### **clans**

Unilineal descent groups whose members claim descent from a common ancestor.

#### **exogamy**

A rule that requires a person to marry someone outside his or her own group.

#### **endogamy**

A rule that requires a person to marry someone inside his or her own group (e.g., a lineage, an ethnic group, a religious group).

#### **bridewealth**

The valuables that a groom or his family are expected or obligated to present to the bride's family.

economic and revolves around wealth, particularly yams, banana leaf bundles, and skirts, all of which are controlled ultimately by women.

One reason men marry is to obtain yams. Yams are more than food in the Trobriand Islands; they are valuable symbols or objects of wealth and are used as gifts to create and sustain relationships among people. They are particularly important in marriage transactions and in the continued tie of a woman to her matrilineage. Trobriand family yam gardens belong to the wife, but they are tended first by her father and later by a "brother." Each year at harvest time the yams grown in her garden by her father or brother are ceremoniously taken to her. The amount and quality of the yams grown by a woman's brother are usually proportional to the bridewealth given to the wife's family by the groom's family when the couple was married. Early in the marriage these yams are stored in the rafters of the couple's hut, and the husband uses them as valuables to be redistributed to those of his kin who contributed the bridewealth. Later—often 10 to 15 years later—if a man is recognized as important by his wife's kin, they construct a yam house for him to store the yams they bring each year. The amount and quality of the yams stored and displayed by a man are indications of the regard in which he is held by his wife's kin and of his status in the community. The yam house is, according to Weiner (1988), like a public bank account.

As a man seeks a wife to obtain the yams grown for him by his wife's brother, brothers seek husbands for their sisters, not only for the children nurtured by the husbands for their wives' matrilineage but also for the help of the brothers-in-law in obtaining banana leaf bundles. Sisters are obligated, with the help of their husbands, to prepare bundles of banana leaves to be used to finance the funerals of members of their matrilineage. Some are made by the woman, but her husband may have to purchase additional bundles. They are given away at funerals by members of the deceased's matrilineage to people who were important in the life of the deceased. The more important the person was to

the deceased, the greater the number of banana leaf bundles he or she receives. In this way, members of a matrilineage uphold their honour and status; to fail to fulfill these obligations would bring dishonour to the matrilineage.

The development of Trobriand family life, then, must be understood in the context of the movement of such goods as yams and banana leaf bundles between husband and wife and members of the wife's matrilineage. It is the successful completion of the cycle of exchanges of yams and banana leaf bundles that ensures the stability of a marriage and a matrilineage.

The Trobriand nuclear family promotes stable bonds between husband and wife, although divorce is both frequent and easy to obtain. The initiative is usually taken by the wife. Most divorces occur in the first year of marriage; they are rare after the couple has been together for a few years.

Although fathers are not technically members of their children's family, they are important in the lives of the children. Once children are weaned they sleep with their fathers, and later the father is responsible for enhancing their beauty with presents of shells, necklaces, and tiny tortoise-shell earrings. These objects are evidence of a father's presence



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Among the Trobriand Islanders, lineage is traced through the mother, and individuals must marry outside their own clan. Here, a Trobriand chief on Kiriwina Island is shown with family members at the home of one of his two wives.

in the life of his child; in fact, Weiner (1988) says the term for a child with unpierced ears is translated as "fatherless." So important is the tie that develops between a man and his son that when the son marries, the father may try to convince him to remain in his village rather than moving to the village of his maternal kin, as is expected.

## The Family Cycle of Rural Chinese

The key relationship in Ju/'hoansi families is between husband and wife, and among Trobriand Islanders it is between brother and sister. In China, the family centres on the relationship between father and son. Marriage in traditional China is less a matter of a man getting a wife than of bringing a child bearer into the household. As Hsu (1967, 57) describes it, "a marriage is made in the name of the parents taking a daughter-in-law, not in the name of the son taking a wife."

Since marriage has far less to do with relations between husband and wife than with those between the husband's family and a daughter-in-law, marriages in rural China are almost always arranged, often far in advance, and there is little, if any courtship. When a boy is six or seven years old, his parents might hire a matchmaker to find a girl who will eventually be an appropriate bride for their son. Since they believe that the time of a person's birth influences his or her personality and fate, the parents may also enlist the services of a diviner to make the appropriate match. The matchmaker takes a red paper with the time and date of a girl's birth to a prospective groom's family. The boy's mother brings this paper (or papers, if there is a choice of brides) to a fortuneteller, who predicts the compatibility of the boy and girl. If a girl is deemed appropriate by the fortuneteller, the matchmaker tries to convince the girl's parents to accept the match. If she is successful, the bridewealth—that is, the marriage gifts of the husband's family to the wife's parents—is then negotiated.

Another way parents can obtain a wife for their son in rural China is to adopt an infant girl who will be reared in the household and later will marry the son. Although this kind of arrangement is not as prestigious as bridewealth marriage, it has two advantages: since the prospective bride was raised in the household of her future mother-in-law, she is more likely to be obedient, and paying a bridewealth for an adopted daughter-in-law is unnecessary. The major disadvantage is that the prospective bride and groom are raised as brother and sister and often find it difficult to make the transition to husband and wife.

The adoption of a boy to serve as a husband for a daughter is a third way that marriages are arranged in rural China. A family does this only when it has no sons. The adopted boy then assumes the family name, so that his sons continue the line of his adopted father. Such marriages are not as respected as others, and a man who is adopted into his wife's family bears the stigma of having abandoned his parents and ancestors. For poor or orphaned boys,



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In a rural Chinese wedding, the bride's mother places a rose in the bride's hair and then transfers it to the groom. The couple then proceed to the household of the groom's parents, where they will make their home.

however, the prospect of heading a thriving household may outweigh such a stigma.

Compared to Ju/'hoansi or Trobriand marriage ceremonies, the rural Chinese wedding is very formal and, for the groom's family, very expensive. The date and hour of the wedding are determined by a diviner, who even decides the exact time the bride will arrive in her sedan chair. The day before the wedding, the girl's **dowry**—goods and valuables that the bride's family supplies to the groom's family or the couple—is sent to the groom's home in a procession accompanied by a band, drummers, and ushers. The dowry consists of such goods as leather chests, tables, stools, cosmetics, housewares, clothing and cloth, but never land or a house. On the day of the wedding, the groom is carried in a sedan chair to the house of the bride; when he arrives, she shows token resistance, and she and her mother weep. She is then carried to the groom's house in a red sedan chair decorated to suggest the early birth of sons. Offerings are made at the ancestors' altar to ensure the success of the marriage. Then the couple is taken to pay respect to the boy's parents—the formal introduction of the bride to the groom's household. Feasting and dancing accompany the wedding and sometimes last for three or four days.

After the wedding, there is little time or place for romantic relations between husband and wife. Hsu (1967) reports that after the marriage, husband and wife sleep in the same bed for only seven days, and there is no public expression of affection between them. Once the wife enters into her husband's family, she finds herself among strangers, virtually cut off from her parents and siblings. She must treat her mother-in-law with respect and acquiesce to the demands of sisters-in-law or other members of her husband's family. She occupies the lowest place at the table, and she does not acquire full status in her husband's family until she produces a male child. Until then, the husband must show indifference to his wife, addressing her through a third party; after the birth of a son, he can refer to her as the mother of his child. For

the groom, marriage is a continued expression of his duty to his father and his ancestors. Whereas divorce is fairly common among Trobrianders and among Ju/'hoansi, it is virtually unheard of in rural China. A husband can take mistresses with impunity, and in theory, he can murder an adulterous wife. Wives have no rights of divorce. A wife may flee her husband's household, commit suicide, or become a prostitute, but a woman who wishes to leave her husband and in-laws has few other alternatives.

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## QUESTION 5.3: WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF SEXUALITY, LOVE, AND WEALTH?

### Sex, Love, and Wealth Among Ju/'hoansi

Wealth plays no part in the lives of the Ju/'hoansi, but especially for women, according to Nisa, sex, love, and beauty are very important. A Ju/'hoansi woman's sexuality is her major means of negotiating the conditions of her relationships with others. Sexuality is important first for her own well-being. Nisa told Marjorie Shostak (1983) that if a girl grows up not learning to enjoy sex, her mind doesn't develop normally; if a grown woman doesn't have sex, her thoughts are ruined and she is always angry. Moreover, a woman's sexuality maximizes her independence. Sex attracts lovers, and a love relationship, being voluntary, recognizes the equality of the participants. By taking lovers, a Ju/'hoansi woman proclaims her control over her social life, because she can offer her sexuality to men as a means of vitalizing them. Nisa talked candidly about sex,

#### **dowry**

The goods and valuables a bride's family supplies to the groom's family or to the couple.

male impotence, and the contributions women make to men:

There is one trade-off for Ju/'hoansi women who use their sexuality. Men see them as sources of male conflict and consequently as potentially dangerous.

Motherhood, unlike sexuality, is not easily bartered by Ju/'hoansi women. In other societies, parents may stress how much they have sacrificed or suffered for their children, thus using motherhood or fatherhood as a way of creating obligations and ties. It makes little sense for a Ju/'hoansi woman (or man, for that matter) to make such a claim. Children owe their parents little; there is no need for bridewealth or dowries for marriage, and food and kin to care for them are plentiful. The dynamics of Ju/'hoansi families are built on the need of individuals to avoid permanent ties and obligations and to maintain their independence.

## Sex, Love, and Wealth Among Trobriand Islanders

The maintenance of sexuality is important throughout life among Ju/'hoansi; among Trobriand Islanders, it is important for women only prior to their marriage. Armed with the magic and bodily adornments contributed by her father, but without the wealth (yams, banana leaf bundles, other valuables) she will later acquire, an unmarried woman uses her sexuality to negotiate her relationships with others. Once married, she ceases to emphasize her beauty and sexual

attraction and, instead, emphasizes her fertility and motherhood. A woman's worth, once measured by her father's concern for her and by her own sexuality and beauty, is determined after marriage by her ability to collect yams for her husband, produce children, and provide banana leaf bundles for her matrilineage.

Men's sexuality is viewed very differently. Since Trobrianders claim that men play no role in reproduction, their sexuality is never very important anyway. Their physical attractiveness, however, is important, for this is what attracts lovers and later a wife to collect the yams by which a man measures his status. Beauty is especially important for chiefs. They must maintain an aura of sexual attractiveness in order to attract more wives, whose fathers and brothers will supply the wealth they need to maintain their influence.

Wealth also forms different kinds of links for Trobrianders. Because Ju/'hoansi have little wealth to contend for and what there is (e.g., meat) is widely shared, the links that men create with their wives' families are based not on wealth but on their labour. Among Trobrianders, however, men who want to marry must use the wealth of members of their matrilineage as bridewealth payments to their wives' families. They are required to return this wealth to members of their family by redistributing the yams they later receive from their wives' brothers. Moreover, the yams they receive from their brothers-in-law are in some ways payment for the children their wives produce—these children are members of the matrilineage of the wife and brothers-in-law.

## Sex, Love, and Wealth Among Rural Chinese

The themes of sexuality, love, and wealth are played out very differently in Chinese rural families. Whereas Ju/'hoansi and Trobriand adolescents have considerable freedom to utilize their sexuality to attract and influence others, quite the opposite is true in China. If a girl comes from a family that is wealthy and influential enough to make an attractive match for her, she will have little to do with boys. Virginity is both valued and necessary for a Chinese

\*NISA: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman by Marjorie Shostak, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, Copyright (c) 1981 by Marjorie Shostak.

bride; for a Ju/'hoansi or Trobriander woman, it is almost no consideration. In China, if a girl is known to have been mixed up in an affair, her only chance of marriage is to someone in a distant village.

According to Margery Wolf (1968), romantic love and sexuality are irrelevant also in the relations between traditional Chinese husbands and wives. A wife's function is to produce children. A man who can afford it takes concubines. A man who can't afford it, but does so anyway, is criticized not for his infidelity to his wife but for squandering the wealth of his ancestors and descendants.

Sexuality figures little in the life of a rural Chinese woman either before or after her marriage. Her sexuality is simply not negotiable; instead, it is as a mother that most Chinese women establish significant relations. A woman's value consists in her potential to become the mother of a boy. Becoming a mother cements her relations with her husband, her father-in-law, and her mother-in-law, and it is her motherhood that secures her later life. While a son is obligated to care for his aged mother, the obligation is not so great as it is to care for a father. To compensate, Wolf argues, a woman must establish bonds of emotion and affection with her sons. She may do this with the assistance of her husband. After a boy is six or seven, fathers become aloof and

withdrawn in order to assert and reinforce their authority and control over a son. A mother can use her husband's aloofness from his son to strengthen the son's ties to her. Even if she enjoys good relations with her husband, she will try to reserve the son's affections for herself, while preserving the son's respect for his father.

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## QUESTION 5.4: WHAT THREATENS TO DISRUPT THE FAMILY UNIT?

In the introduction, we briefly discussed contemporary debates about same-sex marriage and teenage and single motherhood in North America. Much of the debate focuses on whether or not these social phenomena pose a "threat" to the typical North American family. There are also threats to the stability and maintenance of traditional Chinese, Trobriand, and Ju/'hoansi families, but these differ from the ones that are perceived to threaten the North American family.

### Threats to a Ju/'hoansi Family

The major threat to family stability among the Ju/'hoansi is conflict between husband and wife over infidelity or the efforts of a husband to secure a second wife. Like many societies around the world, the Ju/'hoansi allow **polygamy**, a form of marriage in which a person is permitted to have more than one spouse. Men are allowed to have more than one wife (**polygyny**), and apparently women are permitted to have more than one husband (**polyandry**), though this is rare. In fact,

### EXERCISE 5.3

In North America, we tend to take romantic love and sexual attraction for granted as central to the development and maintenance of relationships. However, the cases explored above demonstrate that romantic love and sexuality are clearly not universal. Yet there seem to be features of love and sexuality in all three that are similar to life in North American families. Your problem is simply to list those features of conjugal relationships among Ju/'hoansi, Trobriand Islanders, and rural Chinese that resemble those of North American families. Put another way, what features of North American conjugal relationships would be familiar to a Ju/'hoansi, a Trobriand Islander, or someone from rural China?

#### **polygamy**

A form of marriage in which a person is permitted to have more than one spouse.

#### **polygyny**

A form of marriage in which a man is permitted to have more than one wife.

#### **polyandry**

A form of marriage in which a woman is permitted to have more than one husband.

Polygamy is the exception rather than the rule. A survey conducted by Lee in 1968 of 131 married Ju/'hoansi men found that 93 percent were living monogamously, 5 percent were living in polygynous unions, and 2 percent were living in polyandrous relationships.

One reason that polygamy is rare, even though having more than one wife is a sign of prestige, is the family difficulties it creates. According to Marjorie Shostak (1983, 172), a popular saying is "There is never any peace in a household with two women in it." Stories of the complications resulting from polygamous unions are an endless source of humour for those who are single or monogamous. Here is how Nisa described polygyny in her society to Shostak:

Lovers. For a woman, extramarital affairs add variety as well as economic insurance. Here is Nisa again:

*When you are a woman, you just don't sit still and do nothing—you have lovers. You don't just sit with the man of your hut, with just one man. One man can give you very little. One man gives you only one kind of food to eat. But when you have lovers, one brings you something and another brings you something else. One comes at night with meat, another with money, another with beads. (in Shostak 1983, 271)*

Men say that the emotion and passion of extramarital affairs are wonderful—"hearts are on fire and passions great," as Ju/'hoansi say. When Shostak asked a young married man about his lover, he said they fantasized about running away. She asked what it would be like, and he smiled and replied, "The first few months would be wonderful!" Extramarital affairs are likely to be threatening to a husband, however, and they are the most common cause of conflict and violence among the Ju/'hoansi. Wives are important to Ju/'hoansi men because as long as they have wives they are dependent on no one. Male adulthood requires acquiring and demonstrating a willingness to fight for a secure marital status.

## Threats to a Trobriand Island Family

While polygamy is rare, marital infidelity is not. At one water hole with 50 married couples, Lee (1984) recorded 16 couples in which one or another of the partners was having an affair. The Ju/'hoansi recognize certain benefits in taking

\*NISA: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman by Marjorie Shostak, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, Copyright (c) 1981 by Marjorie Shostak.

ranking of matrilineages that groups try to demonstrate their wealth by giving more yams to others than they receive. Since giving may be taken as a claim of superiority, however, it can be dangerous; as Trobrianders put it, "When you give too much, people worry."

Although it may seem implausible, yams could become the focus of a Trobriand soap opera or reality television show. For example, a man's political power, measured in yams, is a direct result of the support he receives from his wife's kin—her yams, grown for her by her father and brother, create status for him as her husband. However, the annual yam gifts received by a husband can also be a source of conflict. If the amount or size of yams harvested does not live up to a husband's expectations, he may be insulted. On the other hand, if a woman's brother is unhappy over the bride-wealth he received from the husband's family or the support given by the husband to his sister in collecting banana leaf bundles, he may purposely communicate his unhappiness by not working hard in his sister's yam gardens. Other plots could be devised about unrequited love, about attempts by fathers to convince their sons to remain in their father's village, and even about incest. But a theme that would be sure to attract a Trobriand audience would be about sorcery.

Trobrianders claim to know of spells and magic forms that are capable of killing. Generally, only chiefs have this power, but others can seek out a chief and, for a price, convince him to use his power against their enemies. Someone who is believed to have this power is both feared and respected; Trobrianders tell of instances when they were challenged and retaliated with sorcery. Vanoi, an important Trobriand chief, told Weiner (1988) about being challenged by a Christian convert who openly mocked Vanoi's knowledge of sorcery. Vanoi offered the man a cigarette, saying that he should smoke it if he doubted the chief's knowledge of sorcery. The man did; he became ill later that night and died a week later.

A person who uses sorcery against another is dominating that person, and since each person's

fate is tied to that of the matrilineage, a threat to one is considered a threat to all. That is why any death among Trobrianders is a serious matter. Since all deaths are attributed to sorcery, every death is a sign that the power of a matrilineage is being challenged by someone from another lineage. Each funeral marks an attempt by the members of a matrilineage to reassert its power; at the same time, the mourners assert their innocence of sorcery. The matrilineal kin of the deceased do this by distributing banana leaf bundles and other valuables to those who have come to publicly mourn the passing of the deceased and to assist with the funeral arrangements by decorating and carrying the corpse. In recognition of their contribution to the life of the deceased, they receive gifts. The deceased's matrilineage empties its treasury to announce its strength in the face of the threat to its integrity that is signalled by a death.

Maintaining one's identity and that of the matrilineage is a never-ending process among Trobrianders because death threatens the network by removing someone from it. Here is how Weiner sums up the meaning of death for them:

*Because of the ever-lasting nature of the matrilineage, the death of one member of the group is a threat to the entire group. The death of a man, in particular, is a threat to the group because it means that there is one less male member of the group. This is because the group is named after the female line, and the male line is not as important. The death of a man means that there is one less male member of the group, and this is a threat to the group because it means that there is one less male member of the group.*

## Threats to a Rural Chinese Family

The biggest threat to the traditional rural Chinese family is, of course, the absence of a son. The lack of a male heir endangers not only the continuance of a household but also the entire patrilineage

through time. A man without sons, a spirit without descendants, has no one to offer incense for him and no altar on which his spirit can find refuge and honour.

The existence of a son is no guarantee of smooth family relations, however. Fathers have enormous authority and power over sons, and sons are obligated to worship, respect, obey, and care for their fathers. But often fathers become overbearing or use force to assert their authority. Margery Wolf (1968) says that Lim Han-ci in the village of Peihotien (see Question 5.3) was unusual in the frequency with which he administered physical punishment to his sons; once he beat them with a hoe handle and left bruises that lasted for weeks.

Regardless of how harshly a person may be treated, however, breaking away from one's father is considered a violent act. Wolf reports a conflict between Lim Han-ci and his eldest son, Lim Hue-lieng, which illustrates both the dilemma of a father-son split and the difficulties that can arise in adopted marriages. When Lim Hue-lieng was a child, Lim Han-ci adopted Lim A-pou, then nine months old, to be reared as the eventual wife of his son. Growing up in the Lim household, Lim A-pou was a model daughter-in-law. She accepted reprimands and punishment without becoming sullen, she did not complain, and she worked hard. However, her relationship with her prospective husband was not a happy one. When Lim Hue-lieng was 19, he committed what in rural China is an act of moral violence: he left home and severed his relations with his father. If a son dies before his father and so is unable to care for the father in his old age, the father ritually beats the son's coffin to punish him. Lim Hue-lieng was able to leave home only because he had become a leader in the *lo mue*, a secret society that is involved in crime and extortion but that also protects the downtrodden and contributes heavily to religious festivals.

Dramatic splits between fathers and sons are rare in traditional China. More frequent is conflict between brothers over the division and sharing

of the family wealth at the death of a male head of the household. In most other rural, peasant societies around the world, the male head of the household designates his heirs before his death. He may in some fashion divide his property among his offspring—**partible inheritance**—or he may leave all his property to one or another descendant—**impartible inheritance**. In rural China the ideal is for brothers to continue to live together and share the inheritance, usually under the direction of the eldest son, thus avoiding the division of property. In fact, however, brothers rarely continue to share, and ultimately conflict between them leads to a division of household property.

Wolf (1968) documents the ultimate disintegration of the Lim household after the death of Lim Han-ci and the resulting arguments over property by the sons and their wives. When Wolf went to live in the Lim household, Lim Han-ci and his oldest son, Lim Hue-lieng, had already died. The two remaining family units consisted of the family of the second oldest son, Lim Chieng-cua, and the family of Lim Hue-lieng's widow, Lim A-Pou. While Lim Han-ci was alive, his power and influence and his control over the family's wealth were enough to maintain the extended family. Once he died, conflict between Lim A-pou and her son on the one hand and Lim Chieng-cua on the other led to the division of family property. The wealth that had held the extended family together served, finally, to drive it apart. After dividing the property, brothers or their families often continue to live in the same house, but they partition it into separate family units with separate stoves, as did the son and grandson of Lim Han-ci. The once extended household becomes, in effect, a family compound.

#### **partible inheritance**

A form of inheritance in which the goods or property of a family is divided among the heirs.

#### **impartible inheritance**

A form of inheritance in which family property is passed undivided to one heir.



## EXERCISE 5.4

An international television production company has hired your company, Creativity Enterprises, to write a pilot episode of a soap opera to be marketed in rural China. The plot of the program you will create will revolve around the Wang family. The Wangs are a relatively well-off farming family in rural China. The characters in the show are to include the following family members: Wang Zhou, the 55-year-old male head of the family; Wang Lim, the wife of Wang Zhou; Wang Xiao, the eldest son of Wang Zhou; Wang Lao, the wife of Wang Xiao; Wang Jiang, the second son of Wang Zhou; Wang Jane, the wife of Wang Jiang; Wang Sally, the 20-year-old unmarried daughter of Wang Zhou; and Wang Nai-Nai, the mother of Wang Zhou. Xiao and Lao have four children, two boys and two girls. Jiang and Jane have two children, both girls. You may, if you wish, add other characters to the story. The story line should be simple but clear, and you are free to embellish the characters in any way you want. Keep in mind, though, the soap must appeal to a rural Chinese audience.

Japan (1937 to 1945), a civil war (1945 to 1949), the Great Leap Forward (1959 to 1961), and the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976). Laurel Bossen suggests that throughout this time, women in Lu Village, in the southern province of Yunnan, have gained some benefits, such as “the end of footbinding, greater recognition of women’s economic contributions, improved female health and education, lower infant mortality, a wider variety of employment options and family choices, more labor-saving technology and modes of communication, and a greater public voice” (2002, 19). Although patrilineal descent and patrilocality are still the rule, Bossen (2002, 229) found families in Lu Village that followed uxorilocal marriage, where the husband leaves his village and moves to the village of his wife. Lu villagers use the term “*zhao guye*” or “seek a son-in-law” to refer to uxorilocal marriage.

After the Cultural Revolution in China, women gained more control over their lives than they had in the 1960s when Wolf did her fieldwork. Ellen Judd (1994) has suggested that legal changes, such as the Inheritance Law of 1985, which allows daughters to inherit their parents’ property, as well as the increase in women’s access to employment in rural North China, have allowed some women to gain some freedom from previous constraints.

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## QUESTION 5.5: HOW HAS THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF FAMILIES CHANGED?

As we stated in our introduction, a lot has changed within Ju/'hoansi, Trobriand, and rural Chinese societies since the anthropologists noted in the previous sections of this chapter did their fieldwork. Culture is never static, and even small changes in both local societies and global politics may affect how different people in different places construct their beliefs about family relations and kinship. For instance, between the 1930s and the 1970s, China experienced almost constant turmoil: the war with

### Challenges to Theory in Anthropology

Anthropologists experienced changes in the ways they think about and study family relations when they began to question the origins of some of their main assumptions. The idea that these assumptions might be rooted in Euro-American culture and then used to describe and analyze other cultures gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s. In Canada, Martin Silverman (1979) questioned the relationship between political economy and anthropology as it applies to the ways that European and anglophone North American anthropologists view their own family relationships and those of other peoples in other cultures. Silverman argued that the view

of marriage as an exchange of women, for instance, with men directing the exchanges, resembles the model of commodity exchange “in which something is bought and sold … a thing which has no rights of its own, and in which the direct producer has no rights” (1979, 71).

Linda Stone (2001) has reviewed two important factors questioned by David Schneider in the early 1980s: factors that led anthropologists to re-evaluate some of their underlying assumptions about how different societies establish connections among family members. The first was Schneider’s critique of his own work among Yap families in the West Caroline Islands. The more Schneider thought about what he had written, the more he began to wonder how much of what he had described as Yap notions of relatedness were projections of his own Eurocentric beliefs about the role of biology in kinship. When he re-evaluated his account of Yap kinship, he found that two of the fundamental kinship terms in Western biological explanations of conception and birth—mother and father—did not apply to Yap notions of producing children. The biological term “father” as anthropologists were using it was only roughly equivalent to the mother’s husband at the time she became pregnant in Yap society. Likewise, the term “mother” applied to the woman who gave birth to a child, but this child was placed in her womb by ghosts, not by the fertilization of her egg by the father’s sperm.

The second factor was Schneider’s critique of the ethnocentric evolutionism in studies that assume kinship is important in small-scale societies only where it provides the basis for social organization. In this argument, kinship loses importance as societies become more complex and disappears as a major institution in modern industrial states. Families likewise change from the large extended size in small-scale societies to the efficient nuclear size found in North America. This, according to Schneider, might actually be an anthropological myth, and if the myth itself is investigated, “kinship might … become a special custom distinctive of European culture” (Schneider 1984, 201).

When Schneider asked, “Is blood really thicker than water?”, several anthropologists began to take a closer look at whether groups that used kinship terms for their association were related on the basis of biology or on the basis of some other factors. Co-residence on the basis of friendships, for instance, may look like kinship from the outside, especially when family terms are used as identifiers. The notion of whether “blood” or some other substance is the basis of how family members are related has also been debated. For example, whereas in the Western science model children are related to their parents through “blood,” people in a neighbourhood of Gaborne, Botswana, told Frederick Klaits (2005) that husbands and wives become “of one blood” when they have sexual intercourse and produce children.

Food is another substance that may be more important than blood in creating kinship. David and Dorothy Counts (1998) tell a very instructive story about their own experience of being defined in kinship terms by the Kaliai people, whom they visited in New Guinea to do their research. They believed that their adoption into a Kandokan family had been basically only fiction and then learned to their surprise that it was very real: “We learned that when members of our Kandokan family brought us bananas, pineapples, and watermelons, and we gave them rice, fresh bread, and tinned beef, we were not just exchanging groceries. We and they were becoming family … When they fed us and our children and received food from us in return, we were exchanging the stuff of which substance is made: we were *becoming* Kaliai” (1998, 152).

Another major influence on how anthropologists study family relations is the feminist insight that we must question the ways in which the structure of families and their connections to biology reinforce gender inequalities. For instance, the fact that women give birth is consistently translated into a closer attachment of women to nature and to home, whereas men are more able to take part in the wider social sphere of politics and economics. But to what extent is this association between femininity and nature culturally constructed?

Several anthropologists have conducted studies of the ways in which the increased use of biomedical imaging technologies during pregnancy foster the development of an emotional attachment between mother and child. Rayna Rapp (2007) and Lisa Mitchell (2001), for instance, have examined the use of ultrasound in the United States and Canada respectively. We tend to think of ultrasounds as apolitical and “routine” elements of most pregnancies. Ultrasounds can be used to monitor the health and size of a developing fetus, to check its position within the uterus, and to determine sex, among other things. However, they were not routinely used within North America until the 1980s, when women’s bodies became subject to increasing surveillance and monitoring with changes and improvements in biomedical imaging.

These days, for women who are intending to keep their babies after birth, ultrasound appointments are ritualized events. The woman typically brings her partner, a friend, or a family member to the appointment. Assuming that the pregnancy looks “healthy,” the language employed by the sonographer functions to personify the fetus and to foster a bond between the mother and her otherwise invisible fetus. Rapp (2007, 615), for instance, writes that when sonographers are speaking with pregnant women, they “attribute motives to fetal activity and presence: a fetus that is hard to visualize is ‘hiding’ or ‘shy’; an active fetus is described as ‘swimming,’ ‘playing,’ or even ‘partying.’” “Showing the baby” drives its personification, and the mother-to-be is given a picture of the fetus to take home.

This process of visualization, according to Rapp (2007), becomes a key means through which mothers form a social bond with their fetus. Ultrasound pictures are often circulated on social media—on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter; they are placed in albums, framed to hang on walls, posted on refrigerator doors, or even circulated to family and friends via e-mail. In this way, the fetus is perceived as a viable “baby” (even if, at this point, the fetus could not live on its own outside the womb), and the mother-to-be becomes engaged in social conversations about

motherhood and pregnancy. Ultimately, ultrasound pictures, or what Mitchell (2001) calls “baby’s first picture,” are one of a multitude of ways in which the problematic association between femininity and “nature” can be shown to be informed by cultural processes.

These sorts of feminist critiques of our dominant perceptions of motherhood and family relations have encouraged studies in which a variety of other factors, such as history and power, are taken into account when anthropologists ask how family relationships have formed. A prime example of the influence of the heteronormative concept can be found in the history of colonization and the ways in which European colonizers viewed local family relationships as “primitive” when they differed from the European patriarchal model. In the Caribbean, for instance, family relations were defined as “abnormal” because many households appeared to lack a male figure who acted as the head of the family. Lisa Anderson-Levy, a Jamaican anthropologist, argues that colour, class, and gender work together to structure Caribbean families. Lower-class women tend to be the unmarried heads of their households or to live in extended households headed by their unmarried mothers. Upper- and middle-class women, whose skin colour is lighter, tend to be married and to live in nuclear families. Thus, “marriage was, and to a certain extent still is, something that rich people do” (2000, 195). Even female sexuality is race and class specific in Jamaica. Lower-class, dark-skinned women are thought to be unable to control their sexuality, whereas light-skinned, middle-class women are supposed to be fully in control.

Internal colonization, referring to the treatment of Indigenous peoples by the state, often follows the same pattern. Anthropologist Max Hedley (1998) has written about how families in the Walpole Island First Nation changed after the Department of Indian Affairs insisted that they reorganize their agriculture. No longer was growing food a community project, as in the past; instead, it was a matter of individual household production,

with men as heads of the families. Around the same time, band government was imposed on the community, with women excluded from formal participation, unable to either hold office or vote. With the introduction of wage labour and formal education, the status of women within the family decreased as they left to work outside the home. Professional educators then took over important aspects of socializing children. All of this changed the meaning of motherhood.

The study of family relations has expanded to include gay and lesbian families and families produced by in vitro fertilization and by surrogate mothers. Gay and lesbian marriages became legal in Canada in July 2005, making Canada the fourth country in the world to recognize same-sex marriage (the other three were the Netherlands, Belgium, and Spain; since then, sixteen other countries have joined the list). As Meg Luxton (1997) points out, when families are formed by gay and lesbian couples, the definition of marriage is changed: both sexuality and child bearing are separated from legal marriage. This separation of marriage and child bearing has been one point of contention in the debate about gay marriage in Canada. Those who oppose gay marriage cite the family as the institution in which

children are produced and argue that the purpose of sexual intercourse—that is, between a male and a female—is to accomplish this.

Yet this does not mean that gay and lesbian couples cannot include children in their families. Children may be brought into the marriage from a former heterosexual relationship; other options for producing children are adoption, in vitro fertilization, and surrogate mothers. Indeed, all three methods are being used by heterosexual couples as well as by gay and lesbian couples.

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## QUESTION 5.6: HOW CAN UNDERSTANDING PATTERNS OF FAMILY RELATIONS BE RELEVANT OUTSIDE ACADEMIA?

As we have seen, knowledge of family relations helps us understand a whole range of things, from parent-child relations, to marriage and courtship patterns, to ideas about love, sexuality, and wealth. Understanding these relations can help societies address a multitude of issues involving families—for example, spousal abuse, divorce, and parent-child conflicts. The same knowledge can be valuable for those who work in a variety of fields that require an understanding of intimate human relations. Anthropologists, for example, can apply their understanding to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS.

The major problem in AIDS prevention (and in the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, or STDs, more generally) is how to persuade people who are sexually active to protect themselves and their sex partners. Condom use is one of the simplest and most common measures. Yet even when people are aware of the risk of contracting an STD, they often fail to take this easy precaution. What do medical practitioners and those working in AIDS



Gay men celebrate the legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada.

prevention need to know in order to design effective prevention programs? And what can anthropologists do to help?

## AIDS Prevention in Namibia

As noted earlier, we have been using the “ethnographic present” when describing patterns of Ju/'hoansi family relations, though in reality, many aspects of daily Ju/'hoansi life have changed since anthropologists first studied them. Ju/'hoansi territory spans the border of the contemporary nation-states of Botswana and Namibia, and the Ju/'hoansi are being buffeted by the same local, national, and global forces as their fellow citizens. Richard Lee has been doing fieldwork with the Ju/'hoansi since the 1960s and has witnessed the effects of these forces firsthand. One unavoidable force that has shaped, and been shaped by, Ju/'hoansi kinship patterns and practices is the AIDS pandemic.

In the mid-1990s, when Lee and medical anthropologist Ida Susser began conducting research on the epidemic in southern Africa, one in every four adults aged 19 to 44 in South Africa, Namibia, and Botswana was HIV positive, and rates were rising (Lee 1996, 27). On the one hand, governments were making a concerted effort to mount publicity and education campaigns, even in remote areas where the Ju/'hoansi have traditionally lived. On the other, Lee and Susser were surprised by the relative “calm” surrounding the AIDS epidemic in the public sphere. Lee argues that silence and stigma about both sexual practices and AIDS in these southern African countries contributed to this deceptive sense of calm (28). Silence surrounded AIDS-related illness and deaths, and AIDS-related deaths were characterized simply as the result of “a long illness” or “unknown causes.” In fact, physicians in Namibia were encouraged to omit any mention of AIDS from medical documentation (28). Such silences were a result of the strong stigma of having AIDS. Often, those who were infected hid their illness out of shame, and many transmitted the disease to their unknowing partners while they

kept their secret. At the time, Lee argued that “only when the magnitude of the problem is clear and the terrible stigma overcome will it be possible to make the critical behavioral changes that will prevent the further spread of AIDS” (30).

At first glance, the Ju/'hoansi would seem to be especially vulnerable to the AIDS epidemic. Anthropologists such as Paul Farmer (whose work we discuss in Chapter 7) have shown that poverty, inequality, and marginalization exacerbate the spread of AIDS throughout the world. Susser (2006) points out that contemporary Ju/'hoansi are in an unusual position in terms of poverty and inequality. Poverty is relative, and while the Ju/'hoansi may not have much in terms of material wealth, their relatively egalitarian society has helped them avoid the gap between the rich and the poor that often contributes to ill health. Although the Ju/'hoansi have not lived exclusively as hunter-gatherers for many years, many still gather some berries and nuts and snare small animals, and these unique patterns of subsistence have provided a slight cultural “buffer” against the encroachment of surrounding groups and the incursion of capitalism (206). Ju/'hoansi kinship practices—especially sharing and women's sexual autonomy—are central to this cultural buffer; moreover, Susser suggests that these practices have protected the Ju/'hoansi against the spread of HIV/AIDS.

These protective effects are most evident when we compare those Ju/'hoansi who continue to live in relatively remote areas to those who live in Tsumkwe, Namibia. Once a small Ju/'hoansi village, Tsumkwe has become an administrative centre, populated and visited by Ju/'hoansi, civil servants, tourists, cattle farmers, construction workers, and border guards. Ju/'hoansi living in more remote villages engage with capitalism by selling goods or services through community cooperative organizations, which mediate collectively between the villages and the market economy (Susser 2006, 215). However, the Ju/'hoansi in Tsumkwe are not protected by the social organization and kinship relations of the (partial) subsistence economy;

instead, they enter into the lowest, most exploitative levels of the economy, which revolves around tourism and services. Besides living in poverty in Tsumkwe, many Ju/'hoansi spend a lot of time (and money) at local *shebeens* (makeshift bars that sell home brew), where Ju/'hoansi women often engage in "survival sex" (Susser 2009, 182), often with non-Ju/'hoansi itinerant workers.

Two important differences between life in remote villages and life in Tsumkwe stand out as relevant to understanding the spread of HIV/AIDS. The first is that, according to Susser, villagers "are somewhat protected from the individual risk and insecurity involved in marginal work and the lowest rung of the tourist economy, [and] appear to be less vulnerable to the ravages of HIV/AIDS" (2006, 215). The second is that, as we saw in section 5.3 above, Ju/'hoansi women living in small villages continue to exercise a great deal of sexual autonomy and authority, which has limited the spread of HIV infections in those villages. By contrast, rates of infection among Ju/'hoansi women in Tsumkwe are much higher. When Susser asked a group of young married women in a small "traditional" village if they would be able to use a box of male condoms, they replied, "Give us some, and we will teach our husbands how to use them" (2009, 171). This self-assuredness is markedly different from that of Ju/'hoansi women living in Tsumkwe, and from that of women from other ethnic groups in Namibia, whose experiences of economic and gender inequality, coupled with silence and stigma around sexual practices, make it nearly impossible for them to ask their partners to wear condoms. Anthropologists and others note that the introduction of the female condom appears to be giving women some measure of autonomy and self-protection. Although exact figures are lacking, it is clear that the Ju/'hoansi—especially those *not* living in Tsumkwe—have a much lower incidence of HIV/AIDS infection than their neighbours (between 3 and 6 percent as opposed to the national average of 25 to 30 percent) (Lee and Susser 2002).



© Ida Susser

Women discuss the female condom. Dobe, 2001.

Clearly, prevention efforts aimed at the Ju/'hoansi will build on the insights of Lee and Susser's fieldwork. Maintaining aspects of a foraging way of life, which allows families to maintain their households and women to maintain aspects of their historic autonomy, will make all the difference in limiting or even preventing the spread of HIV infections among the Ju/'hoansi.

Elsewhere in Namibia we see an altogether different links among kinship patterns, sexuality, stigma, and HIV/AIDS. Robert Lorway conducted fieldwork in Windhoek, Namibia's capital, with a gay and lesbian community group, the Rainbow Project. He found that the greatest barrier to successful prevention initiatives in this community was the perception, perpetuated through public health initiatives, that "AIDS in Africa" is exclusively a Pattern II, or heterosexual, epidemic (Lorway 2007, 276). There are virtually no public health campaigns in Namibia that address homosexual behaviour in their prevention education, and as a result, men who have sex with men are more vulnerable to HIV infection (Lorway 2006, 435). For example, there was a common (mis)understanding among men who had wives or girlfriends, and who also enjoyed sex with men, that they were practising safer sex when sleeping with men. One of Lorway's informants explained: "Most of the men I know who have girlfriends are saying that they prefer to

have sex with us *moffies* [effeminate males] because they don't want to catch STDs cheating on them, or HIV, or get someone pregnant. Most of them think they can even have sex with men without a condom because they think it is less risky than sex with a woman" (Jason, 21-year-old male from Katutura) (2007, 276).

Lorway's work shows that, although heterosexual intercourse *is* the main source of transmission of HIV in Namibia, the exclusion of any information about same-sex transmission was limiting possibilities for education and prevention. These transmission myths were compounded by intense anti-homosexual sentiment (and laws prohibiting homosexuality) in Namibia, which resulted in equally intense stigma, shame, and secrecy. Lorway's fieldwork demonstrated the urgent need for short-term interventions that would work even in a climate of intolerance and fear. During his fieldwork, he was actively involved in precisely this kind of prevention: through the Rainbow Project, he helped coordinate community-level education strategies that could "move safer sex information through secretive social networks without risking public exposure" (2007, 292). Maintaining secrecy may run counter to mainstream HIV-prevention

goals, such as raising public awareness about homosexual transmission and encouraging acceptance of homosexuality in the public sphere, but Lorway's ethnographic evidence suggests that doing so is the most culturally appropriate and immediately effective way of promoting prevention. His work, like that of Lee and Susser, demonstrates just how important it is that "intensive ethnography is centrally incorporated within the methodologies of health science projects" (2006, 448).

## EXERCISE 5.5

### Developing a Program for Prevention of STDs

For this exercise, you play the role of an HIV/AIDS prevention specialist and help design a program for your culture to promote condom use. You need to answer the following questions:

1. What are some of the cultural barriers that might inhibit condom use? Are any similar to those in Namibia?
2. What are some measures that you would suggest to help people who are sexually active overcome these barriers?

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we have examined the structure and dynamics of family life among three peoples—the Ju/'hoansi, the Trobriand Islanders, and rural Chinese. Throughout the chapter, you have been asked to think about those aspects of the North American family that we tend to take for granted as natural but that are culturally situated and often unique. As we have seen, each society has different rules about whom a person regards as a family member, and family membership can vary based on variations in descent systems. In each case, we have also thought about how the family is formed and how the ideal family type is maintained in these societies. But it is important to keep in mind that these ideal types are not static and timeless; sometimes, the idea of an ideal family type can be contentious. Sexuality, love, and wealth each play a key role in family life, although as we have seen, the significance of each varies from culture to culture. Often, the forces that threaten the family unit are those that threaten sexuality, love, or wealth as they are understood in each cultural context.

Although kinship questions have always been central to anthropology, the ways that anthropologists think about and study family relations have changed a great deal in recent decades. Critiques such as those by David Schneider and various feminist anthropologists have inspired some researchers to be more aware of the effects of colonialism and of their own underlying Eurocentric assumptions about what families should look like. Nonetheless, knowledge of family and intimate relations in a society remains an important focus of anthropological research, and, it is important to note, can be applied to the development of culturally appropriate and effective programs to promote sexual health.

## CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What are some common ways in which we use the idea of family as a metaphor for other kinds of social relationships (e.g., in the workplace or in teams)? What do we accomplish when we make these kinds of metaphorical comparisons?
2. Debates about same-sex marriage in North America often pit “traditional family values” against “universal human rights.” What have you learned in this chapter (and the rest of the text) that might undermine this straightforward dualism?

## KEY TERMS:

- bilateral kinship** (p. 132)
- brideservice** (p. 133)
- bridewealth** (p. 142)
- clans** (p. 142)
- dowry** (p. 145)
- endogamy** (p. 142)
- ethnographic present** (p. 130)
- exogamy** (p. 142)
- extended family** (p. 137)
- impartible inheritance** (p. 150)
- incest taboo** (p. 139)
- kinship** (p. 130)
- matrilineage** (p. 134)
- matrilineal kinship** (p. 133)
- nuclear family** (p. 132)
- partible inheritance** (p. 150)
- patrilineage** (p. 137)
- patrilineal kinship** (p. 133)
- polyandry** (p. 147)
- polygamy** (p. 147)
- polygyny** (p. 147)